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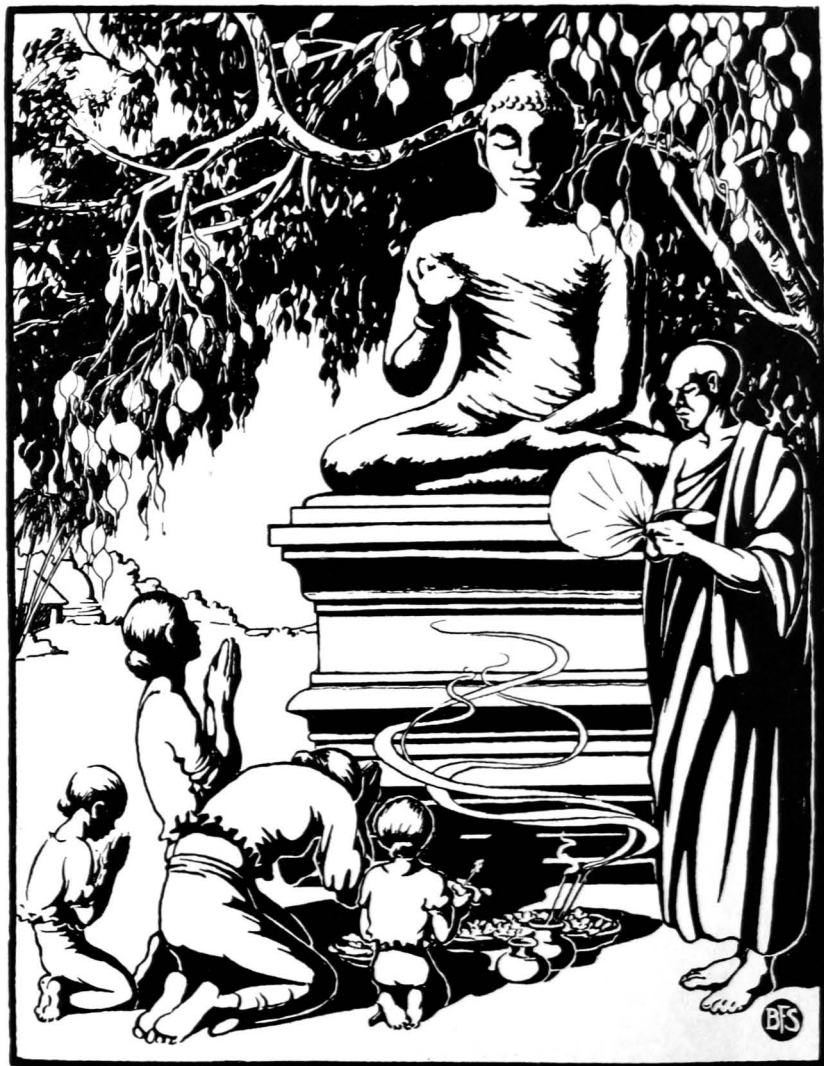
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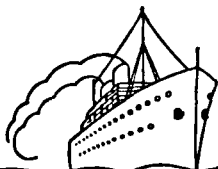


# CEYLON

by

ASHLEY GIBSON

Author of *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago*



Illustrated by

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**To H. M. T.**

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*Cinnamon and Frangipanni*, which in the following pages reappears as plain *Ceylon* in a series whose *raison d'être* is a practical one, was published nearly seven years ago. To-day, if I had to write the book afresh, I should do it differently. The task is one I have contemplated, and deliberately abandoned. The book "came out" that way in response to the genuine urge which produced it. With all its faults I still retain a sneaking affection for it, and written anew it might be something quite different, which I might not like at all. Certain excrescences have been pruned, various minor points of detail corrected or brought up to date. If that "soul of Ceylon," which one reviewer was kind and clever enough to discover on the volume's first appearance, really did get enmeshed somehow in the tangle of its shreds and patches, it must be still there.

Seven years in a place like Ceylon means a whole generation, and since I lived in the island there have been changes. Two short visits, and the regular letters of old friends, have kept me informed, I hope, of their character, and because "Outward Bound" books cannot afford to be behind the times, these changes must be indicated to the reader.

More than anything else, perhaps, the advent in Ceylon as elsewhere of unlimited motor-cars has affected both Asiatic and European populations. That curious thing called "European prestige" is dwindling; natives of the soil and their immigrant cousins foregather increasingly in the rest-houses they were formerly too shy to enter.



Galle Face Green, especially on Sundays, has become a quite cosmopolitan promenade, and there is an air of general emancipation outside the social confines of the heaven-born. If this is regrettable, or anybody's fault, only Europeans will regret it, and only they must be blamed. Probably it is just a matter of evolution. For in essentials, barring the planting community, with whom slumps and their economic consequences have tamed the exuberance that once enlivened Colombo and Kandy hotels at week-ends, and among whom the bachelor majority has diminished as out-station and estate bungalows have become more accessible, the Ceylon European has not changed. He is there—most of him—to make money—lots of it. Brokers, for some occult reason, count on making, and do make, more than other people. A very large car, a complete ignorance of the island, its jungle, its permanent inhabitants; an enormous bungalow in Queen's Road, furnished like a rest-house (if the family have any pretensions to culture, "etchings" from a portfolio in the big Fort stationer's are considered "severe" and chaste); the price of rubber; who has made enough money to retire next year? the latest Scotch joke, the excitement and bonhomie of the weekly tea sale, these supply all the interest and inspire all the conversation. "Getting away from Colombo" means golf at Nuwara Eliya; reading means Edgar Wallace; the play is the local dramatic society's current production; music, by the police band, is considered classical if it is Gilbert and Sullivan and not Red Hot Momma. These things provide a contentment that suffices; and along such lines new arrivals may concentrate in justifiable hopes of "making good." Fortunately the microcosm retains all the elements of a Western society, so there is a gallant European minority that maintains somehow, by help of the mail and booksellers' catalogues, contact with things of

the mind. A further section who, though confessedly outside the orbit of these influences, make simplicity their watchword and lead the quiet, decent, kindly lives they would pursue in any London suburb or provincial town at home. Colombo is a big place and, though they may want looking for, provides a social fabric with holes in it to fit almost any sort of peg. Out-station folk were always readier to welcome the stranger, and as they have been they remain.

The real difference is not in the European, who sensing change about him murmurs "Bolshies," and dismisses the matter from his mind, but in the educated natives and burghers, who are learning how to apply their intelligence, who have a permanent interest in the place which we lack and which, in time, they will employ to oust our temporary interest. It is astonishing how, in the last eight years or so, these people have progressed in their appreciation of art and music and in their general standards of living.

Compared with these matters, the mere eruptions of bricks and mortar that have occurred on familiar areas of its superficies since I first wrote of Ceylon seem hardly worth remark, but I must pay the penalty of a somewhat ill-regulated desire to be informative by duly noting them. Many new buildings in Colombo, apart from those noticed in my revised text, include the Town Hall, the usual white elephant from the public's point of view, and the Greek temple erected by the Government in its own honour in front of the old barracks on Galle Face. No Oriental influence is traceable in most of the architectural designs, steel frames combining with Roman pillars and domes constructed without apparent regard to the exigences of air or light. Already the new Customs House pile is declared to be too small to house all the activities allotted to it. Electric lifts have still to go in according to the

original plan, and adequate provision for these seems to have been overlooked.

The old type of bungalow is rapidly disappearing. No more large compounds, airy verandas, and roofs of the old round tiles that were our legacy from the Dutch. On mushroom suburbs has sprung up a jerry-built Golder's Green, lacking evidences of any town-planning scheme, mean little dwellings huddled on every available bit of road frontage. They have no gardens—and yet this is Colombo! But none lacks a garage, none (æsthetes that we all are) bright blue curtains in the windows. The inhabitants of these quarters lead, as I gather, more their own lives than did their predecessors of ten years or so ago; in this year of grace the "old cats" are rather ignored and the "young cats" have different methods.

But enough of Colombo, when there are so much jollier places in Ceylon within easy range, if those garage doors mean anything. There is Trinco, clean across the island in the far north-east corner. You need sleep only one night on the road. I wish I could remember in real exactitude of detail the sad story of Francina of Trincomali, who was, I shouldn't wonder, a Dutch maiden. Certain it was, anyway, that she fell in love with a young civil servant, and certain (this is the tragic part, or half of it) that he failed to reciprocate and expedited his leave to Amsterdam. The morning of her knight-errant's departure saw Francina, quite beside herself with inhibitions and mortification, stationed upon a cliff of golden rock which, falling sheer into the greenest sea imaginable, commands the harbour entrance. When she could almost toss a pebble upon the poop of her beloved's ship as it rode out through the narrows, Francina jumped. Her pitiful remains were never found, but her sorrowing parents erected the pillar (an ancient carved Hindu monument lying handy and unclaimed in the vicinity)

which stands to this day at the spot. An annual ceremony is still held about it, not by Francina's compatriots but by the Hindus. A ghost ship too sails these waters, they say a Dutch frigate sunk by the British in a running encounter.

There are legends in my book already, more legends, I think, than statistics. Space forbids, or I should have taken this opportunity to mention many others, discoursed further of the island's more recent history, told the full story say of that riven rock on the Kadugannawa Pass, fulfilment of a prophecy that Kandy would never be taken until a "great rock" was pierced, which indeed it never was until the British blasted this and other rocks and made the road your car runs over to-day. On that same road there are stones put up more than a century ago to show our red-coated soldiers toiling up to the taking of Kandy which water-holes were safe for them to bathe in. I think I have mentioned Solomon, though not the Greeks and Romans, whose coins somehow found their way here and are still frequently picked up, "fakes" many of them that the Sinhalese no doubt accepted in all innocence. I have only touched upon the Dutch influence, still traceable in so many architectural evidences, forts, churches, and houses. Galle might be, is indeed, a bit of old Holland. Still occupied by the visiting justice when assizes are on, there stands at Jaffna the house of the old Dutch governors, built for giants, all its doors of rare island woods twice the usual height; a ghost too with its own romantic story. I had already one to finish up with. She must not wish for too much company.

ASHLEY GIBSON.

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